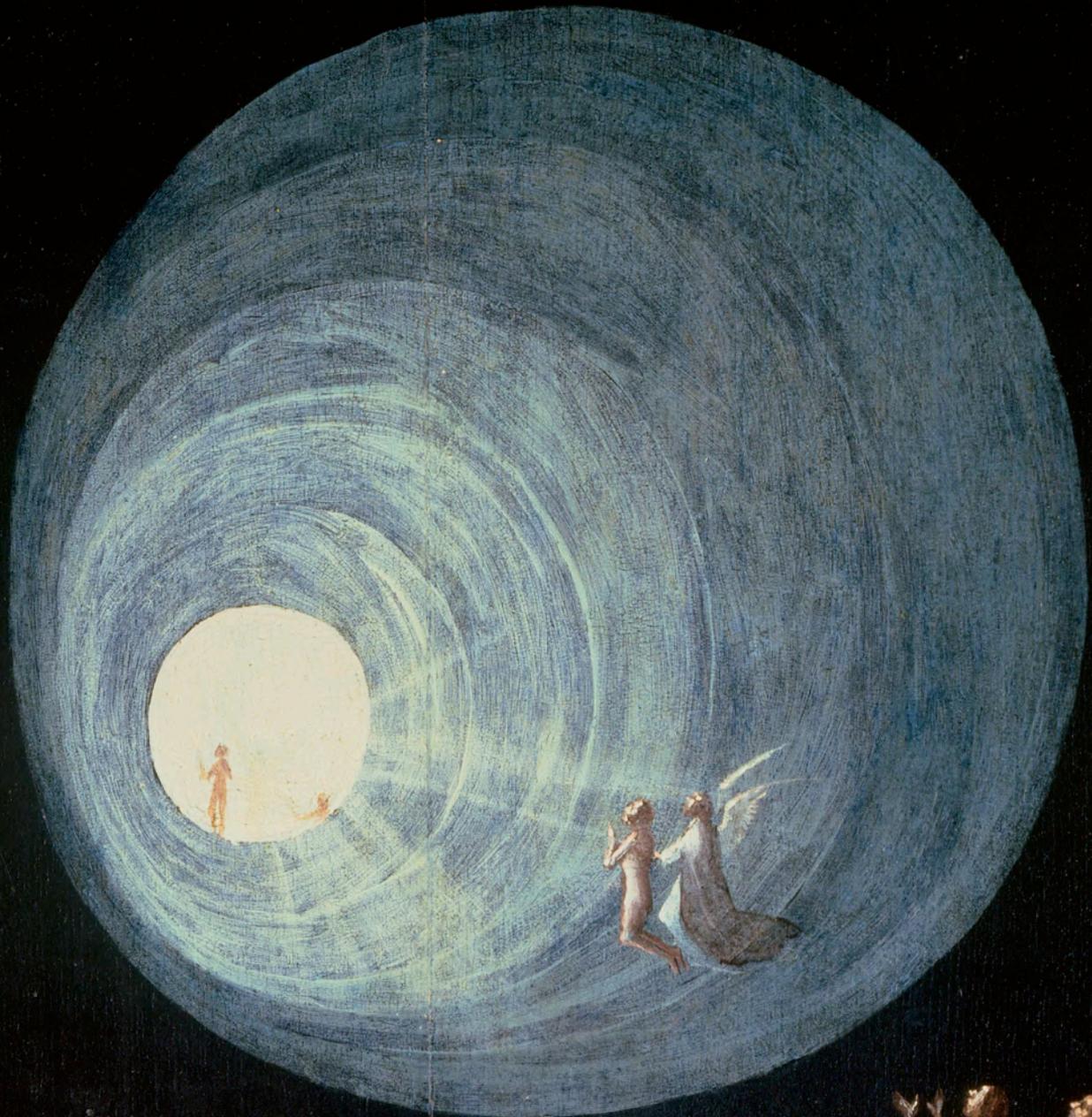




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The Afterlife



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Editor's Note

The Afterlife

The afterlife has been an incognito obsession in human beings throughout history. Due to our ability to understand theory of mind and abstract thinking, we have an understanding that, similarly to other people, our lives are finite. Throughout the millennia, humans have speculated about what may happen to us once we are no longer alive. From an empirical viewpoint, the only thing we know is that people who leave this life do not come back, at least not in a palpable manner. In the religious order, prophets and leaders have developed a different number of explanations for a life after death. Forty thousand years ago there were probably as many religions as there were tribes all over the world, but over the last two thousands years, religion has gone through globalization. Today, Judaism and its derivatives: Christianity and Islam, and Buddhism and Hinduism, dominate religious thinking across the globe. Christianity dominates the Western World. Christian theologians incorporated the ideas from Platonic philosophy about the afterlife. As such, they believe in a punishment or reward in the afterlife depending on how justly or unjustly one has lived their own life.

From a scientific viewpoint, what may happen to us after we die is unknown. The latter is the biggest argument for deniers of a life after death. Nonetheless, para-scientifically we have collected some insights about a possible life after death. In near-death experiences, for example, a small percentage of people who resuscitate from cardiorespiratory failure and have no electrical activity recorded in their electroencephalogram (mimicking a brief death experience), report conscious memories of what happened during this transition. These experiences tend to be

universal across different cultures and ages, indicating a biological mechanism: a life review, peaceful feelings, a light or tunnel, an out-of-body experience, and a conscious return into one's body. At times, some of these people can describe the 'rescue scene' despite being in a coma. Scientifically, there is not a clear explanation for this phenomena, and, due to that a non-local consciousness may exist, argues Dutch cardiologist, Dr. Pim van Lommel. This hypothesis would allow for speculations about a life after death. If our consciousness continues to exist beyond a physical substrate, a life after death could be potentially possible. In the physicalist model of the mind, a model that has been largely embraced by psychiatry, a non-local consciousness would not be possible. This model does not contemplate psychological activity without a physical substrate. Therefore, if accepted, near-death experiences and the non-local consciousness hypothesis would challenge our current understanding of human consciousness. In fact, consciousness continues to lack a consensual model in the scientific community. In a physicalist model, consciousness could be potentially explained by a computational system. However, a computational system alone still would not explain human consciousness. To this date, an artificial consciousness equivalent to human consciousness has not been created. We still lack a clear mathematical model of the mind. No matter how much artificial consciousness emulates the human brain, our emotions, feelings, potential freedom of choice (a compatibilist free will model) and multiple other different aspects of the mind have not been reproduced artificially.

Some physicists have postulated a quantum consciousness model. Though it remains speculative, this model could potentially explain human consciousness beyond a computational model. According to British mathematician and physicist, Sir Roger Penrose, the mind cannot be algorithmic and a quantum consciousness model could potentially explain this problem. In this case, there should be changes in the mass of the brain that could become "one" or "the other" in the quantic model. Penrose initially thought that nerve propagation could fit in this quantum model, however, he believes nerve propagation functions in a way that would disrupt the coherence needed in a quantum system. A "mass" candidate in the brain to support a quantum model is difficult. A potential "quantum mass" in the brain could be large enough for physic experiments but too small for biological experiments. Biologist Stuart Hameroff has now

contacted Professor Penrose to propose the role of the microtubules in the neurons as the candidate for a quantum model of mind and consciousness. The mass in the microtubules could better fit a quantum model, in which they would move and become different things. The microtubules, the filaments supporting the neuronal structure, which to this date have been largely neglected by neuroscientists, psychiatrists and neurologists may have now become a key element in the understanding of the human mind, consciousness and, perhaps, the afterlife.

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Icons of Psychiatry

Ascent Of The Blessed

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Ascent of the Blessed is one of the four paintings forming part of a polyptych painted by Hieronymus Bosch. The polyptych entails four visions of the Hereafter including Paradise on Earth, Fall of the Damned into Hell, Hell, and Ascent of the Blessed. The entire piece searches to educate people on what may happen after we die. According to the Catholic tradition in the Netherlands of the 16th century, after death there would be a judgment of the souls, where the damned who sinned would be punished and sent to hell, and the blessed who followed a pious life would be rewarded by unification with God. According to the Platonic tradition, Hell, or 'Below,' would be reserved to those who followed an unjust life and Heaven, or 'Above,' would be the place for those who followed a righteous life.

In the image, we can appreciate a number of blessed souls represented as their naked bodies ascend to a union with God with the help of the angels who are depicted as dressed up people with wings. At the top of the image, there is a light and a



tunnel. The blessed souls seem to peacefully and joyfully move towards the light. Scholars in near-death experiences studies have proposed the Ascent of the Blessed as one of the first depictions of a near-death experience. They argue that Bosch could have had some understanding of the experiences reported by those who had been close to death. In near-death experiences a person often sees a light or a tunnel and feels a need to walk or move towards that light in a connection with a higher power. People often report these experiences as mystical or very spiritual. It is certainly possible that in a 16th century society, in which early death and epidemics were more prevalent than nowadays, people were more familiar with these near-death experiences. Bosch may have depicted this general knowledge in Ascent of the Blessed. As such, the Hereafter polyptych by Bosch not only depicts the Catholic theses on the Afterlife, but an early depiction of a more real near-death experience, the closest evidence of a possible life after death in the empirical realm.

Painting:

The Ascent of The Blessed by Hieronymus Bosch, Gallerie dell'Academia, Venice, Italy

Source: wikimedia commons

Essays

A Visit To The Afterlife Under The Watchful Guidance Of Psilocybin

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Introduction

This writer has been part of a study group of mental health professionals. Our subject of study is medicinal properties of psychedelic substances. This has been loaded with controversies from the time of its inception in our contemporary history so much that the government created in the 1970's the controlled substances act making psychedelics forbidden for medicinal purposes. And now thanks to recent research with psilocybin, MDMA, LSD, ayahuasca the FDA is very receptive for their use in psychiatry. Both MDMA and psilocybin have now been granted "breakthrough" status for compassionate treatment to fast track the approval for treatment of PTSD and Treatment Resistant Depression (TRD)

When Fernando our chief editor solicited contributions for this issue I was processing a recent experience with psilocybin where I witnessed my own death. So, with permission from the reader I will try to convey with the written word what that event was like and what did I learned from it, something that readers can benefit.

One can say that this was a "bad trip" or to put it positively a challenging event, nevertheless it has helped me and still is a work in progress.

The Event

Three of us clinical psychiatrists took 5 gr of the mushroom itself much more than the 4gr recommended by Michael Pollan in his book “How to change your mind”. In an undisclosed location we tried to reproduce the “set and the setting” the mind set and the cozy environment following the research format done with MDMA and Psilocybin by MAPS and Johns Hopkins. These two highly respected institutions are pioneering the research model for psychedelics. What was missing in our experiment was the presence of a therapist to monitor and integrate each individual experience, we trusted our formal psychoanalytic training and many years of clinical work would suffice to have the confidence it was a doable event.

It took no time to go under the influence of the mushrooms. Very quickly I felt the need to isolate myself into my own internal world and moved away from my two fellow travelers. One of us volunteer took role to monitor our experience as much as his presence of mind would allow it.

As I focused into my own mind scenario I came across a fast approaching life-threatening situation faster than I could do anything to prevent it. I was in the middle of a big crowd with no familiar faces around. I realized a suicide bomber was nearby and I had no chance to escape the place. I knew my end was coming and I was going to die. I was in a dream within a dream from there was no way to escape. I tried to persuade myself it was the psilocybin-induced altered state of mind and it was not for real. After all, I for sure did not want to dye yet. To complicate matters my mind played an unforgivable trick on me and made me question my judgment. I thought to go back to my normal sense of existence was an illusion and indeed I was dying. I bursted in tears regretting not to have the company of my beloved wife at the time of my death. Next thing I recall I was a ghost in the afterlife. I was able to observe people around me but I was invisible to them.

Background History

This was not the first time I experimented with psychedelics. I took ayahuasca during my rural internship in the Peruvian jungle, I had a childhood trauma with dogs and medicinal ayahuasca

brought healing by finding solace in the presence of a dog. This was a transformative event in my relationship with dogs.

Since my childhood years I grew up with an inordinate fear of death that went beyond universal human fear of the unknown. My worst ultimate fear was to be buried alive by mistake and die inside a coffin. It became an obsession beyond comprehension.

In my years of individual psychotherapy and psychoanalysis I came to find out repressed memories of being given away from my mother to my grandmother as a consolation award following the death of my grandmother's youngest son at age 16. He died from bursting of his appendix and subsequent peritonitis back when antibiotics were not available yet.

Under my grandparents care I never felt deprived of love and affection or of any material needs. I never got an explanation how come I was not growing up with the rest of my siblings and my real parents I grew up under the watchful protection of my grandmother specially. She always made me feel something terrible could happen to me and I needed her protection. The source of her anxiety was hidden to me.

Connecting The Dots

As I began to process my "bad trip" I found deeper meanings and realize that it was not just a coincidence why the spirit of the mushroom took me to witness my own death. Was this a trial to conquer my fear of death?. It was certainly a hard lesson to learn. when you are not afraid to die you are no longer afraid to live. Unbeknownst to me it was my grandmother's anxiety about death that was transmitted upon to me all these years. After the lost of her youngest child she was unprepared to lose another child under her care. It has been a liberating process.

I am grateful to amanita muscaria for the source of freedom allowing me to find more enjoyment out of life. If I have a choice how to be the moment of my death I wish I could not be alone and have the closeness the people I love. It gave me freedom to imagine my own death and be surrounded by the people who love me and I love.

Also, as we move closer to use psychedelics in psychiatry it is necessary to be very clear about the set and the setting and the presence of a therapist to integrate the experience into a healthy outcome.

Let me finish by quoting Freud “The future may teach us how to exercise a direct influence, by means of particular chemical substance, upon ... the neural apparatus. It may be that there are other still undreamt of possibilities of therapy”

Reference:

Sigmund Freud, “An Outline of Psychotherapy” 1938

An Afterlife Experience On Psychedelics

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“During the forth and final night of the Ayahuasca ceremony, I left my sleeping mattress in the ceremonial hall and went outside to the edge of the jungle. Perhaps I should restate. There was no "I" at that time. I have no recollection of how I arrived there or the process of walking there from my resting mattress. All I remember is at some point in the ceremony, I was outside. At the time, I had no idea of where I was, who I was, or much of anything other than that I had this sense that I was supposed to put together clues of what was around me. Everything I saw also had some sort of symbolic value. For example, a dog walked by, and I took this as a symbol or clue I was supposed to figure out. I remember not knowing what parents or a sister were, or that I had them. Even the idea of having parents seemed alien and strange. And there was some clue I was supposed to remember. And some name I was over and over trying to remember.

Eventually, the head shaman came out, and I remember telling him that this was another clue. He was from Colombia and I was supposed to trust him. I didn't know anything about him, or that he was a shaman, or that I was in a ceremony. It was just that naked directive that "you are from Colombia and I am supposed to trust you.”

Then the narrative changed. As if I was entering a different reality where all was light. It was as if everything I had ever known or experienced was false. Because this was the true reality. And it was comforting in a way, but also completely strange and alien. There was also a sense of that I was being pushed to transcendence, like a plant pushing out of the darkness and into the sunlight.

But there also was a sense of confusion and repetitive thoughts at the same time. I was trying to overcome these to get to the transcendence. I remember thinking that transcendence was somehow above me and I needed to push through something to get into the sunlight. I remember trying to dance and jump up to break out of the false world that I had been living in. At this time, I had some recollection of Marina. As if we could join together, be one, and push

into this transcendent domain which would result in the dissolution of myself and everything I had known. The end to the false reality. The complete union with God.

Then the sense of confusion increased. I remember thinking over and over that I had to remember some clue. Also, that there was some secret about Marina that I wasn't supposed to tell the people around me. I had old memories of childhood, old football plays, old childhood friends that were part of the clues I was trying to figure out.

Later, I remember looking at the shaman from Colombia, and seeing that his face turned to death. Also, the palm trees in the jungle transformed into burial mounds and I felt I was in a realm of death. The scariest part was that this realm of death would continue forever: an eternal cycle of death. And I became frightened by the death. There was a directive that these people around me were death and much worse, that they would trap me into this imperfect world of endless repetition and suffering. I would be born again, over and over again into a false world and never achieve transcendence.

I became convinced that not only were these men trying to keep me in the realm of endless suffering, but that they were trying to hold me down to rape me. Some of the shaman were offering me water and I was convinced that the water was alcohol which was related to the hell realm of endless repetition. In other words, if I drank alcohol, I would relax into the realm of endless repetition and suffering. The men around me were also telling me to relax, which I took as a sign that I should not relax, because that was relaxing into death, and I must struggle.

I remember looking into the ceremonial room and seeing the women lining up for what was in retrospect the second drink of plant medicine. I understood the line to be sperm lining up to impregnate the ova. I wanted to be that one sperm that made it to obtain life. But I knew that to achieve that, I must struggle. By this point not only was Jeff trying to restrain me, but a number of the other men as well. I remember yelling out for Marina, telling her that I loved her and that I was sorry and that it would never happen again. I called out for her to help me. But at the same time, I knew I should not tell the men something about her because it would betray her and was a secret.

At some point, after believing that I had to be the sperm that fertilized the ova, I remember thinking that I had to push hard to get out of this hell realm of males. I imagined

myself in a womb trying to force myself out into the realm of light. I wanted to be born. I did not want die. As I struggled against the men, I thought I was pushing out of a birth canal into the light.

At some point, I became free and walked into the room with the women who were participating in the ceremony. At the other end of the ceremony hall was Sean, my roommate during the retreat. I did not know that at that time, I just knew he was a male to be avoided because he was in league with the other males. Still he seemed less threatening. The shamans seemed to recognize this, and they encouraged him to follow me outside as I seemed intent on walking out the other end of the hall.

I don't remember what happened next. Sean told me that I took off running. The next thing I remember is that I was at the gate to the compound. (See photo below). It is approximately a quarter mile (maybe more) from the ceremony hall. On the other side of the gate is a road surrounded on all sides by jungle. I went past the gate. Eventually Sean and the shamans and Jeff caught up with me. I was told there were also security guards there at that time. I was barefoot at the time and had cuts and scrapes on my feet.

Outside the gate, Sean was trying to get me to come back. He gave me a stone that he kept with him that represented his heart chakra. We then began a lengthy negotiation over whether I should keep the stone. Sean told me afterward that the negotiation lasted over an hour. I was concerned that the "heart chakra" would weigh me down like an anchor and keep me with the men. I also felt that since the heart stone belonged to Sean, he should keep it. I also was concerned about Sean's health. I think he started to vomit outside, perhaps from the plant medicine, perhaps from chasing me. I chastised the other men outside the gate because they were more interested in paying attention to me--rather than Sean--which I interpreted as another sign that they were evil. Outside the gate, I was still trying to reach Marina, but obviously, it eventually dawned on me that this was not going to happen.

Eventually, I came back. Literally and figuratively.:-) Lewis, M. Brain Change in Addiction as Learning, Not Disease. N Engl J Med 2018;379:1551-1560.

Articles

Where Do We Go From Here?

A Christian Perspective On The Afterlife

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For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16 NIV)

Life after death. What a huge topic, and one for which I can hardly unravel in this short essay. What is heaven? Do we return to a paradise earth? Why have those with near death experiences claimed they do not want to leave heaven or this “place” they briefly experienced? Is this feeling truly more spectacular than we can imagine? Is this a place where the lion can lay with the lamb, where there is no cruelty, wickedness or sin? We cannot imagine it. We only know because it is what God has told us. This is faith. And this is what I believe.

I am assured there is an afterlife. It is so powerful to me that we have a God who would perform a supreme act to show His love for us by offering his only-begotten Son to redeem His people even after they repeatedly disobeyed Him. In the Old Testament we had a stern God. God’s chosen people, the Israelites, were “as human with fault and feeling, or just as fallible as anyone else” (Mark Schimmelpfennig, Chaplain at Road Home Program at Rush University Medical Center). In the New Testament God gives the promise of salvation through the offering of His Son. We have a God that redeemed us because He *wants* us to be with Him. As a Christian, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and I believe He rose from the dead and came with the message, “*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full*” (John

10:10 NIV). There are faiths of all kind that selectively believe various teachings of Christ, though in my personal relationship with God my beliefs as a Christian extend to His eternal promise. That is, Christ's promise of eternal life for those who walk in His light.

My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am (John 14:2-3 NIV)

I do not have to convince myself that there is a God. I look outside at the complexity of this earth and I know. I dedicate my life to the study of medicine, yet no matter the hours I devote I will hardly scratch the surface of the depth of God's creation. I could never believe that life is random by chance. Science from the perspective of the human race will continue to expand. It is impossible for any single medical professional to learn and know everything, hence our ever increasing number of sub-specialties. I find it humbling that in all of our groundbreaking discoveries, there is nothing God does not already know.

Yet there is a link between all of this. As a doctor of psychiatry, my primary focus is to treat the mind. However, in my undergraduate training at Creighton University I was also taught the Jesuit tradition to value the whole person in mind, body and spirit. As both a physician of psychiatry and a Christian this only makes sense. So, when our physical body passes, what happens to our spirit, or soul? I will start with a definition of the soul. "Our soul is our life essence that has been given to us by God, it is what allows us in a theological sense to live forever in God's grace and glory" (Chaplain Schimmelpfennig). The soul is an immortal, invisible presence. When we die I believe our souls will rise to heaven if we believe in the redeeming grace of Jesus' death on the cross.

Simon Peter asked him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus replied, "Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later." (John 13:36 NIV)

Though my faith in Christ has given me good reason to believe in the afterlife, sometimes I wonder how much of my belief was initially shaped by hope. As Chaplain Schimmelpfennig eloquently stated, “Faith is something you believe in when common sense tells you not to.” It certainly is easier to comprehend the idea that life does not end at death and find comfort in the belief that there is something after this life. I have not the slightest idea the emotions I may feel when death comes knocking at my door. I anticipate I will likely be anxious. However, I pray that my faith in the afterlife will prevent me from experiencing fear.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7 NIV)

When I was in medical school I recall a special patient when rotating through home hospice. She had end stage COPD yet would still remove her oxygen to step on the porch and smoke a cigarette. With an estimated 6 or fewer months to live, she was happy. One day when I went to visit she was not home. I soon discovered she was transferred to inpatient hospice. I went to visit her, and I will never forget the look in her eyes as she lay there, unable to speak. I held her hand and talked to her. Though she appeared comfortable, I will never know what she was thinking or what the look in her eyes were telling me. Was she scared? Was she anxious? Was she at peace? Based on prior conversations I would have liked to think she was at peace.

He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. (Revelation 21:4 NIV)

God has not given us all of the answers. It’s hard to understand this, but nothing happens without God’s knowledge, good or bad. He allows everything to happen to us for His ultimate glory through Jesus Christ. We don’t always see it when it is happening. Many times the reason becomes apparent years or more later. I do believe God has a plan, and I will leave the details of what that plan entails to Him. I also believe that life after death is a part of His plan.

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6 NIV)

So as a Christian, what exactly does the afterlife mean to me? Everything. The average person lives until 70 years of age. Eternity is forever.

The Beginning Of Life After Mortal Life In Islam

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One of the most common questions that every human being has wondered at some point of their life is the question of what's next after life. Is one's last breath in life the end or the beginning of another journey, a journey that is longer and infinite. One of the challenges in life is there is no certainty of today or tomorrow. In Islam, God, translated in Arabic to (Allah), is the custodian of our affairs and our destiny. In Islam, death is the beginning of life, and an eternal life which is not threatened by disease, war, or crime. Islam in its entirety means submission to the will of Allah (God) to attain the rewards of this life and for the eternal life which is the afterlife.

Life can be considered a journey where there are two roads one which the path of righteousness where Allah has promised to reward with heaven and the other path of falsehood and sins which leads to punishment of Hell. In Islam, this life can be compared to an examination that is ongoing where there can only be two results, which are pass or fail. However, Allah has promised in the Quran that even if your sins are countless, his Mercy is endless. *Verse 74 in Chapter 5 in Quran, states "Will they not turn to Allah in Repentance and seek his forgiveness? And Allah is all forgiving, Most merciful."* While there are two eternal abodes possible in the afterlife, the Quran talks more about Allah's mercy and Heaven than his punishment and Hell. Every chapter of the Quran begins, with Bismillah Hir Rahman Mir Raheem, "In the name of God, the most beneficent, the most merciful." In perspective, Islam stresses our creator has given more chances and opportunities to obtain one's position in heaven than in hell.

It is always recommended in Islam, to keep the afterlife in your hindsight. Imam Ali, the cousin of the prophet, and a divine leader of Muslims, once said, "*Do for this life as you live*

forever, and do for the afterlife as you die tomorrow. “As we don’t know how long our lives will last, we don’t know when our afterlife will begin. The journey of the afterlife begins from the night one is buried in their grave. Just like a newborn baby is frightened as they open their eyes for the first time in the world, an individual is frightened as they open their eyes while they are lying in their grave. A life of good deeds can make an easier and seamless transition from the worldly life to the afterlife. While after life begins after death, the eternal portion of after life begins after the Day of Judgment. From the moment of infancy to the age at which a child obtains maturity and accountability, the afterlife is similar to the mortal life, where barzakh is the maturation to the day of judgement when your accounts of your good deeds and bad deeds are opened.

The journey from the worldly life to the eternal life is called Barzakh in Arabic. In essence, it can be considered a place between heaven and hell where a soul waits for trial before his lord. This waiting period can be a place where you experience the early taste of heaven or hell depending on if your accounts of deeds is heavier on sins or heavier on good deeds. The concept of Barzakh can be comparable to the Christian concept of Limbo. In Barzakh there are seven checkpoints, in analogy to a security check where your transition to the day of judgement can be easier or difficult based on your actions in this world based on the themes of those checkpoints. Those seven checkpoints include kindness, prayers, charity, fasting, pilgrimage, cleanliness, and the last is giving each other their rights. This journey through these obstacles finally leads you to the boarding gate to your eternal destiny, which is none other than the day of judgment.

The day of judgment, when each human being stands trial, their book of deeds will be read to Allah(god). The first deed that will be questioned is faith, faith in the creator, faith in the prophets such as Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and the last Prophet Mohammad, and faith in the tenets of Islam which are in ways similar to the tenets of Judaism and Christianity. One of the tenets of Islam is that Allah (God) is just, in Arabic translated into being just. When our creator will look at our deeds, he will look at if we knew any better, what our conditions in life were, if we repented, and there could have been an atom of a good deed that can be of great magnitude that it can outweigh our bad deeds. It is difficult to predict our destination if it is heaven or hell, as this

judgement can only be passed by our creator. However, as humans we can only hope and strive for heaven. Just as in life as Allah gives more chances for each of us to live, than to die, there are more chances in the afterlife to go heaven than to hell.

Hell in Arabic is called Jahannum. It is a place of punishments, and the punishments are ordained according to the degree of evil one commits. The punishment of hell is manifested both physically and spiritually. In hell, there are also seven domains, with each one more severe than the one below it. While the Quran has illustrated hell to be an eternal establishment of punishment, it has given an exception, if only Allah wills to exempt from hell, which demonstrated our Creators endless mercy. Some of the punishments of hell involve, fire, boiling water, filthy food, chains and tightness of space. There is no doubt, this is a frightening punishment, but a punishment which is avoidable with sincere repentance. Our creator looks beyond the layers of our organs to our heart to see if there is remorse before the moment death has struck. While one cannot compensate for his evil deeds after death, our creator has given the mercy of loved ones who can pray and go good deeds on one's behalf to bequest for salvation on their behalf. Imam Ali, the divinely appointed leader after Prophet Mohammad, once said, "You will find out your true friends after your death." There is no greater time of need than after death when you could use one's assistance for prayers for forgiveness on your behalf.

Each humans desire is living a good life, and heaven is an eternal life which cannot be described as it is beyond the scope of luxury. In Arabic, heaven is called Jannat, or in another words garden, the same garden Adam and Eve dwelt in. Heaven also has seven domains of which each domain is better the domain below. Everything one will long for will be found in heaven. Some of the attributes of Heaven can be described as having your own residential palace built of gold, with gardens, rivers of honey, endless water, and beauty that one eyes will be astonished with. If you die old you will be bought back to your youth in heaven. One of the greatest attributes of heaven is that you will have a reunion with your loved ones, provided they have also made it to heaven. One day in heaven is equal to 1,000 years on earth. It is also mention that food will be endless, delicious and will never rot. In essence, one does not have to make life on earth hell to obtain heaven as a reward in the afterlife, it is totally possible to live a life of pleasure in this world and still obtain a ticket to heaven. Hence, Islam left the Quran an eternal

book of guidance with instructions on how live an amazing life without sacrificing the afterlife, just like we believe the Old Testament and Bible were sent by God (Allah). Life is but a journey, where one can take memorable photos, which leads to a memorable album. This album is what determines your final destination in the afterlife.

The Afterlife Is Reincarnation

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As I sobbed over the burdens of medical school, which I had underestimated by far, my mother put a warm hand on my shoulder. She said, heart heavy, words solemn, “it is not your fault my dear, I may have done something wrong in my past life for you to go through this. I’m sorry.” At the time, the gravity of what she had said didn’t register to me—I had pages of medical textbooks to leaf through—but it seemed unsettling.

A few days later, when I had calmed down, I asked her what she meant when she made that statement. She took the opportunity to introduce me to Hinduism and its precepts. Prior to this time, I knew Hinduism was a religion, but not much else about it. I also knew mom was an adherent, but I did not witness her being overtly religious. Mother started to educate me on the Hindu concepts of karma, reincarnation and rebirth.

Apparently, in her religion (and mine too, it appears), deeds in one lifetime register as a karmic score (as my mom likes to call it), and come back to influence the next lifetime. That is, if one suffers in this lifetime, it is because they may have a bad “karmic score”. This means that we may have done something wrong in our past life, and it comes around full circle to the current lifetime.

Hinduism, unlike the monotheistic religions of the world such as Christianity, Islam and Judaism, does not teach the concepts of a permanent Heaven and Hell. There is no concept of the “afterlife” in Hinduism, rather, there is the belief in reincarnation and rebirth or ‘punar-janam’. As obtained in the ancient Egyptian beliefs and some monotheistic religious beliefs, a person’s deeds—good or bad—count in their afterlife. These deeds, known as ‘Karma’ (Sanskrit), determine one’s fate in the next life. The Hindu man or woman does not necessary fixate their thoughts on Heaven or Hell; they fear reincarnating as a frog way more! Or a mango, although

arguably delicious. So, if a Hindu wishes to be born as a human, happy and privileged, they must act accordingly in their present life.

In Hinduism, the soul, also known as ‘atman’ in Sanskrit, is a very important concept. It is perceived as separate from the body, the latter only considered a vessel necessary for the atman to survive in the material world. The soul is above all earthly bounds and when the material body dies, the atman survives and moves on to the land of the dead to find another vessel. Therefore, death is seen not as an end, but as a transition to another beginning, another life.

Hinduism follows a cyclic notion of time, believing that what goes around comes around, hence, Karma is the most important of concepts in the religion—determining one’s fortune in the next life. One, depending on his/her deeds, could be born as a human again with physical, mental or social advantages; and if sinful, can be born as an animal or a “lower life form.” Thus, the concept of karma explains the future consequences of behavior and the current misfortune or fortune. Rebirths may be in any life-form: vegetable, animal or human. The human rebirth is considered the highest form of existence since it is only humans that have been gifted with the utmost cerebral intelligence, and the ability to realize the existence of God. Ancient Hindu literature such as the ‘Puranas’ do mention a temporary Hell (naraka-loka) and Heaven (swarga-loka) that are kept aside for Karmic retribution. Once the consequences of virtuous or evil deeds are exhausted, the soul is reborn on Earth. To break away from such an endless cycle of being reborn over and over again, one must liberate their soul and release themselves from the bondage of karma. This is the concept of ‘moksha’ or liberation from the cycle of rebirth (samsara), which can only be achieved when the individual self is reunited with the cosmic self through meditation, austerities and through various physical and mental exercises (yoga). That, however, is an entirely different and complex chapter in Hinduism and is more extensively explored in Buddhism than Hinduism.

Having learned all this, I sat in silence with my mom, me in deep thought, and her, sporting a sad, apologetic expression on her face, both of us, wondering what she did wrong in her former life to burden me with studying to become a medical doctor.

The Afterlife Of A Name

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Death is a mystery. What follows death, the afterlife, if it exists, an even a more profound mystery. The idea of an afterlife is offered to allay our ignorance or bolster our hope about what may happen after our breath becomes air. Carl Jung believed that the afterlife myth resides in the collective unconscious, that aspect of our consciousness embedded in lore that is shared across cultures.

According Jung, “Myth is the natural and indispensable stage between unconscious and conscious cognition . . . a knowledge of a special sort, knowledge in eternity without reference to the here and now, not couched in the language of the intellect.”¹ Through myth, an understanding of the afterlife becomes possible.

Myths of the afterlife hold that the immortal soul leaves the body for a place sometimes called heaven and other times Valhalla, a place in Norse mythology that received the souls of fallen heroes. Whether the soul is fully conscious or holds a fragment of consciousness after we die is unknown. But the idea is that an aspect of the person exists after death.

To quote a verse from the *Hávamál* (The Sayings of the High One), the pre-Christian poem attributed to Odin, “cattle die, the family dies, you’ll die yourself, but one thing that never dies is the name the man leaves behind him.”^{2,3}

The repute a man leaves behind him is captured in *The Iliad* as the warrior hero Achilles contemplates a prophesy about his demise and his place in eternity:

My mother Thetis a moving silver grace,
Tells me two fates sweep me on to my death.
If I stay here and fight I’ll never return home,
But my glory will be undying forever.

If I return home to my dear fatherland
My glory is lost but my life will be long ⁴

A long life, or a name that brings enduring fame? Indeed, Achilles' name lives in perpetuity as the warrior's warrior ever victorious in battle, whether or not he lives on in the underworld.

But what about us ordinary folk, those of us without any particular glory to celebrate? Is the one thing that never dies the name the decedent leaves behind him? The idea of our reputation continuing to exist beyond our existence as living human beings is a kind of afterlife.

I was thunderstruck when a name from the past popped up to invade my present. My computer had locked me out of an account, and I was prompted to come up with a new password. The admonition was not to use any past password. I scanned my crib sheet of passwords and was stuck. I had to come up with an all-new password and had exhausted my supply of meaningful (to me), easily remembered passwords. I racked my mind to come up with something different—at least six letters, upper and lower case, and at least one number.

Strangely, the name of a college friend came to mind. So I typed in Panagakis55 and retyped it as prodded, and immediately my brokerage account opened. Never before had I used anyone's last name as a password.

George Panagakis and I attended college together, and the number 55 referred to the year of our graduation, 1955, from different high schools. In addition to our first names, Panagakis and I had shared the same group of friends. But over the years we had little contact and lived separate lives—he in Chicago and I in New York. We were not close and shared few mutual interests, but he was a serious man with an avid interest in politics. We spoke last about three years ago. We stopped exchanging Christmas cards once Alzheimer's disease had taken hold of him.

About an hour after I changed my password to Panagakis55, I received this e-message from a mutual friend: *Hello George, Our friend George Panagakis left us yesterday.* What an amazing happening! The news of his death stunned me coming as it did shortly after the

password was posted. His passion for politics came to mind. Was it a chance coming together of discrete events or was it a paranormal event? A mystery!

Such experiences reinforce the notion of an afterlife. Perhaps the belief in an afterlife is not so absurd after all. Premonitions are common happenings over a large sample of individuals. Most of us, or someone we know, has had a premonition or a dream of an event that happened later just as our mind experienced it. Occasionally, some of us communicate remotely with another person distantly in time or space—perhaps a dream conversation with the departed or the awareness of an absent friend who relates to us poignantly.⁵

Paradoxically, atheists, agnostics, and the non-religious cling to the idea that some aspect of their being will persist after death. For atheists who espouse a wholly material universe, this confidence in the afterlife is perplexing. If matter is the sum total of the person and consciousness depends on a functioning material brain and body, then what is the nature of the “us” that perseveres after death when brain and body are returned to dust. Perhaps only our reputation?

I thought of my erstwhile friend. George had taken his last breath, pronounced dead by the hospice orderly who attended him in the last hours. After a respectful period of mourning, his remains would be taken to the crematorium and the ashes scattered as he requested. Several weeks later George’s family would gather for a memorial service, recounting those endearing singular qualities that made him the special person that he was. Refreshments would be served afterwards, and the conversation turn to other topics. Weeks later probate would be completed, the will read, assets distributed, clothing donated to Goodwill, and those special personal items—books, jewelry, artwork—given to family and friends who wished to take them. With time his possessions would become theirs and his identity with the items would dissipate. Later someone would recall the classmate who ran for president of the class of 1955. “What was his name?”

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fair fame of one who has earned.

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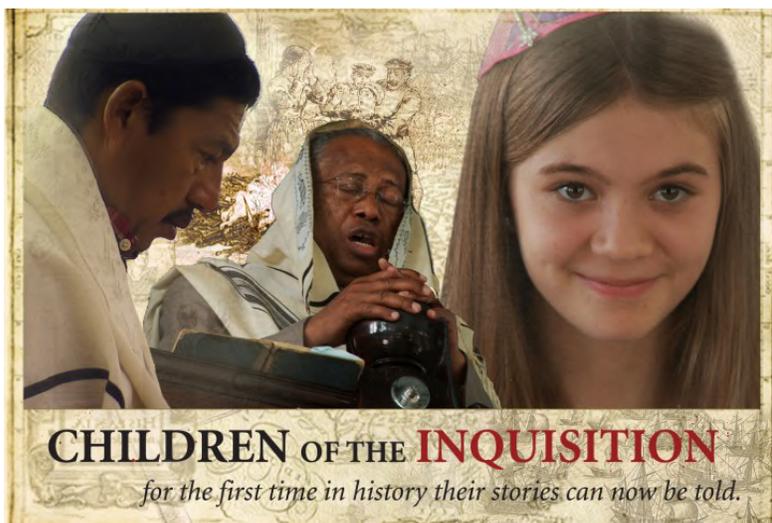
Cinema and Psychiatry

Life After The Inquisition: The Jews Of Spain

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Joseph Lovett's *Children of The Inquisition* is a documentary masterpiece narrating the lives of the descendants of the Sephardic Jews and *conversos* (Jews who were forced to convert to Christianity) who fled Spain and Portugal during the Inquisition in the 16th century. The film is beautifully narrated and edited.



The film follows the path of descendants of the Jews who left Spain for Turkey, Greece, Africa and the so-called New World to this date. Some of these children of the Inquisition are NYTimes journalist Doreen Carvajal, painter Carlos Medeiros, student Ise Sharp and neuroscientist Leonel Chevez. One particular strength of the film is the fact that it poses a very informative history lesson. This is in part due to the collaboration of professor David Gitlitz, an internationally known expert of Hispanic Studies, and the Spanish researcher and historian, Carmen Gómez Gómez. The film combines interviews from these experts with beautiful art images and scenes of modern Spain. The film is highly recommended for any person interested in learning about the history of the Sephardic Jews, which had, to this date, been largely neglected in film and

literature. Since I have a personal interest in this matter and feel very passionate about it, for the purpose of this review I hope the authors and producers won't mind if I take the license to combine some of the key aspects I learned in the *Children of the Inquisition* with some knowledge I have acquired from other Spanish resources, especially through my identical twin brother, Carlos Espí Forcén who happens to be an expert in antisemitism during the Spanish late Middle Ages.

'Sephardic' or 'Sephardi' is the Hebrew word for Spanish. As such, the term Sephardic could be seen as equivalent to Spanish or Hispanic. Sepharad refers to the original land of the Sephardic Jews which was Hispania or the Iberian Peninsula. With the triumph of Christianity in the Roman Empire, including the Roman province of Hispania (today Spain and Portugal), most of the cults and religions in the Empire were largely overtaken and abandoned. However, Judaism persisted and began its coexistence with Christianity in the Empire and ulteriorly, during the Middle Ages, in the European kingdoms. After all, Christianity had evolved from Judaism. However, the Jews in Europe soon became an uncomfortable minority. Already in the early 7th century, famous Christian theologian Isidore of Seville, suggested conversion to Christianity as a solution to create a homogeneous society. In the late Middle Ages, antisemitism became more intense in Europe at the time that the Jews became wealthy as lenders. Christians considered lending a sinful behavior not allowed by the church but society still needed lenders to function appropriately. As such, the profession became relegated to the Jewish population. The Jews in Europe became a privileged minority and had a higher education than the general population. The most prestigious physicians, for instance, often were Jewish. Despite the hostility from the rest of the society, the Spanish monarchs protected the Jews as they were useful to them to collect taxes and money for wars. Often, the monarchs asked the Jews to increase taxes, leading to dramatic increases in interest rates. Due to this, the Jews often became the visible target of frustration which originated by the monarch's decisions at the time that envy generated in the general population towards this privileged minority. Gradually, society began to accuse the Jews of killing Christ. Fake accusatory legends against the Jews spread across Europe, such as, accusations of poisoning wells, re-executing Christ symbolically with crucifixes, wax figures, or even children spread in society. These fake accusations often led to real trials and unfair

executions of the Jewish population by the authorities. Other times, the population itself would start massacres known as pogroms. Of all, the most popular pogrom in Spain took place in Seville. After the sermon of archdeacon Ferrand Martinez in 1391 people began attacking the Jews throughout the country making them choose between conversion to Christianity or execution. As a result, the Jews of Spain were decimated. One hundred years later, the Catholic Monarchs, Isabella and Ferdinand, established the Edict of Granada to guarantee a homogeneous Catholic society, forcing those Jews who refused to convert to leave the country. Paradoxically, Isabella's physician was Jewish and they convinced him to return to Spain so that he could continue to work as the Court physician until her death.

In parallel with the Edict of Granada, many of the *conversos* who remained in Spain were often accused by the Spanish Inquisition of practicing Judaism in secret. This led to new waves of emigration to America where the law was more lenient. The Jewish population who left Spain maintained the Spanish language in the form of Djudezmo or Ladino and the Spanish customs. Many never forgot about their lost home country, Sepharad, and continued to identify themselves as Sephardic or Spanish in their new countries. In Spain, unfortunately, they were gradually forgotten and little was known about them until the 19th century when, during a military expedition to Africa, Spanish soldiers were welcomed by the Jewish community living in Africa, who had continued speaking Spanish after four centuries.

During the last forty years, Spain has made efforts to amend the mistakes made against the Sephardic population. For instance, Spanish president Felipe González and Israel Prime Minister Shimon Peres, a Sephardic Jew, met in 1986. The encounter was remarkable by Peres' famous phrase "We see each other again after five hundred years." In 1992, the Spanish radio and TV



Israel's Prime Minister Shimon Peres and Spanish President Felipe Gonzalez

started programs in Djudezmo to commemorate the fifth centenary of the loss of the Spanish Jews. During the last decade, any person who can prove to be a descendant of the Sephardic Jews that left Spain has been able to apply for Spanish nationality. This past week the current King of Spain, Philip VI, visited Argentina and gave a speech to the Jewish Community leaving the memorable opening “We’ve missed you so much.” Today, many Spaniards who become successful in business or finance proudly state that their success is probably related to having some Jewish blood. This refers to the *converso* ancestry that every Spaniard may have today. While many Sephardic Jews overseas are now returning or strengthening their ties with their original homeland, it would be fair to say that the Jewish presence never left Spain as every Spanish person in the present day is, at least, a little Jewish.



Spanish King Philip VI being awarded by the Jewish community of Argentina for conceding Spanish nationality to the descendants of the sephardic Jews who had to leave Spain after the Edict of Granada

Free Text

Two Men Walking Towards The Uncertain: An Homage To Friendship

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On my recent trip to Colombia, I had the opportunity to visit my good friend, Isidro. He and I grew up in same town of Murcia in Spain, but met in New York City 12 years ago. At that time Isidro was an intern at the United Nations and I was trying to figure out a career in psychiatry in the US. I stayed in his apartment, sleeping on his couch (a typical New York story) for a few weeks, and, soon, we became close friends. Over the last 12 years our friendship has only strengthened. Together, we have run marathons, traveled to different places, visited different cities, shared ideas about family, friendship, and love and, most importantly, we have given each other support during difficult times. Due to that I consider Isidro a true friend and a family member.

This year Isidro moved to Bogota following a new professional opportunity and I felt privileged to have been the first person visiting him. After spending a few days in Bogota, we had the chance to explore the coffee axis area in Armenia. There, we visited coffee plantations, hiked valleys and mountains, and met a lot of interesting people, such as, our intense chofer, Señor Iván, who was fond of Black Sabbath and Pink Floyd (nothing like traveling in the forest with Pink Floyd on the background), Saul, a Greek American surfer and financial investor visiting Colombia prior to moving to Houston or Maria Camila, the owner of our eco hotel who was a descendant of the Jewish *conversos* and had just been granted Spanish nationality. Unfortunately, I got sick with listeria after drinking unprocessed milk and spent some days with bowel issues. Thanks to loperamide and amoxicillin that can nowadays literally save one's life!

During our hike in Cocora Valley, Señor Ivan took a picture of Isidro and I walking towards the fog. I loved the picture and asked Señor Ivan to send it to me so that I can publish it at the *Journal of Humanistic Psychiatry*. The picture captures our bonding experience in Colombia. Together, in our late thirties, we shared our what-ifs, our wonders, and our fears: Two friends walking together towards the uncertain.



Future Issues

Spring 2019 - Jealousy

Summer 2019 - Fanaticism

**To submit a manuscript you can email the editor at
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Image Sources:

wikimedia commons: Ascent of the Blessed and Shimon Peres and Felipe Gonzalez

jewishboston.com: Children of the Inquisition

enlacejudio.com: Philip VI is awarder by the sephardic community

Señor Iván Escobar: Two men walking towards the uncertain